



Afrobarometer Paper No.5

**DEMOCRATIC AND MARKET
REFORMS IN AFRICA:
What 'the people' Say**

by
Michael Bratton and
Robert Mattes

**A comparative series of national public
attitude surveys on democracy, markets
and civil society in Africa.**



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POLITICAL REFORM IN AFRICA

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December 15, 2000

Michael Bratton is Professor of Political Science and African Studies at Michigan State University (MSU). Robert Mattes is Manager, Public Opinion Service, Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA). The data in this chapter are drawn from a series of public attitude surveys in a multi-country Afrobarometer. The Afrobarometer is a joint enterprise of IDASA, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD, Ghana), and MSU, together with national partner institutions in a dozen African countries. The authors are grateful to all partners, especially to the survey teams led by Annie Dzenga, Shola Fatodu, E. Gyimah-Boadi, Stanley Khaila, Christian Kuelder, and Mogopodi Lekorwe. An earlier version of this paper was presented at a conference on “Democracy and Development in Africa” convened by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon, Portugal, June 22-24, 2000. A revised version of the first half will appear in the *Journal of Democracy* in January 2000. The authors thank the conference participants and the editors of the journal and the book for their useful comments.

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INTRODUCTION

Africa is a latecomer to globalization. In terms of timing, African countries have followed rather than led the reform movements that installed democratic and market systems around the world. And, as foreign aid dependencies, African countries experienced considerable external pressure to liberalize. One should not automatically conclude, however, that the impetus for reform originated from outside Africa rather than from within.

This chapter measures whether, and to what extent, mass popular constituencies exist for democratic and market reforms within selected African countries.ⁱ If political and economic liberalization are Northern ideas that are being imposed on an unwilling South, then certain empirical facts should follow. We would expect that most Africans would: (a) be unaware of democracy and markets; (b) have distinct cultural understandings of their meanings; (c) be unsupportive of regimes based on democratic and market principles; (d) prefer alternative political and economic regimes, and; (e) be unsatisfied with what these regimes have delivered in practice. Alternatively, if we find popular awareness of, support for, and satisfaction with recent reform initiatives in African countries, we can conclude that reforms have some sort of indigenous base. It is important to know this because democracy and markets can contribute to the alleviation of Africa's developmental problems only if they are embraced by African people themselves.

To measure public attitudes we employ an original set of data from a large-scale, cross-national survey research project (the Afrobarometer), which is designed to systematically map mass attitudes to democracy, markets and civil society in about a dozen African countries and, ultimately, to track the evolution of such attitudes in selected countries over time. The present paper reports results from a first round of surveys implemented between July 1999 and February 2000 in Botswana, Ghana, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe.ⁱⁱ Face-to-face interviews were conducted by trained interviewers in local languages with a total of 10,398 respondents using a questionnaire instrument that contained a core of common items.

A caveat is in order about generalization. Because country samples were each drawn randomly, they represent national voting-age populations.ⁱⁱⁱ But the six countries selected, which are all English-speaking territories that have recently undergone political transitions to electoral democracy, are not fully representative of the sub-Saharan subcontinent. We do not allege that the findings in this paper can be extended to francophone Africa, to the continent's remaining authoritarian regimes, or to states that are imploding through civil war. If we occasionally refer to "Africans" we have a more limited populace in mind.

To anticipate our findings, this paper reports that Africans (so defined) overwhelmingly support democracy and reject alternate, authoritarian regimes. They are much less happy with the way that democracy actually works, however, though a majority is satisfied in five out of the six countries studied. Against this mass domestic constituency for political reform, we find greater ambivalence about market principles and economic adjustment. The Africans we interviewed are especially dissatisfied with the consequences of structural adjustment, which they associate with widening gaps between the rich and the poor.^{iv} Thus the two modes of reform do not form a coherent whole. There may be a consensus about the compatibility of political and economic reforms in Washington D.C., but this consensus has not penetrated public opinion in Africa.^v While adherents of the free market in Africa tend to support democratization, sympathizers of democracy do not necessarily support markets.

POPULAR ATTITUDES TO DEMOCRACY

Awareness of Democracy

Because democracy means different things to different people^{vi}, we began by asking “What, if anything, do you understand by the word ‘democracy’? What comes to your mind when you hear the word?” Although the question was posed in the local language of the respondents’ choice, the word “democracy” was always presented in English. To all survey respondents who ventured an opinion on the meaning of the concept, we attributed an awareness of democracy. All those who replied that they didn’t know -- or had never heard of the word -- were held to be unaware of democracy.

By this criterion, the concept of democracy is recognizable to most Africans interviewed. Across six countries, an average of almost three-quarters of all respondents (74 percent) were able to volunteer a definition of the term.^{vii} By no stretch of the imagination can democracy be described as a strange and incomprehensible construct in these parts of the continent.

Table 1: Popular Attitudes to Democracy,
Selected African Countries, 1999-2000
 (percentages of national samples, including “don’t knows”)

	Botswana (n = 1200)	Ghana (n=2004)	Malawi (n = 1208)	Namibia (n = 1183)	Nigeria (n = 3603)	Zimbabwe (n = 1200)
KNOWLEDGE OF DEMOCRACY. What, if anything, do you understand by the word “democracy”? (percentage of respondents able to supply a meaning)	69	72	88	65	77	70
SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY. Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government. In certain situations, a non-democratic government can be preferable. For someone like me, it doesn’t matter what form of government we have. (percentage choosing these options)	82 7 6	76 9 14	66 22 11	57 12 12	81 9 10	71 11 13
REJECTION OF NON-DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVES. Military rule. One party state. Traditional leaders. All alternatives (percentage disapproving these alternatives)	85 78 74 61	89 80 74 52	82 77 71 53	59 63 55 36	90 88 - 76	79 74 63 49
EXTENT OF DEMOCRACY. (Our country is) Completely democratic Democratic, but with minor problems Democratic, but with major problems Not a democracy (percentage choosing these options)	46 36 8 5	() (69) () 12	34 28 23 12	30 42 15 3	17 33 46 1	9 18 17 38
SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY. Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in (your country)? (percentage saying “fairly” or “very” satisfied)	75	54	57	63	84	18

Even though democracy seems to be a familiar idea to many Africans, interesting cross-national variations nonetheless exist (See Table 1). The level of public awareness of democracy ranges from a low of 65 percent in Namibia to a high of 88 percent in Malawi. We speculate that the diffusion of political ideas occurs more easily in geographically small countries with high population densities than in large, under-populated countries. Neither Malawi nor Namibia is highly urbanized, however, a factor that probably helps to increase awareness of democracy in Ghana (72 percent aware, 36 percent urban) and Nigeria (77 percent aware, 43 percent urban). Also, education undoubtedly enables awareness, a fact we document later.

The Meaning of Democracy

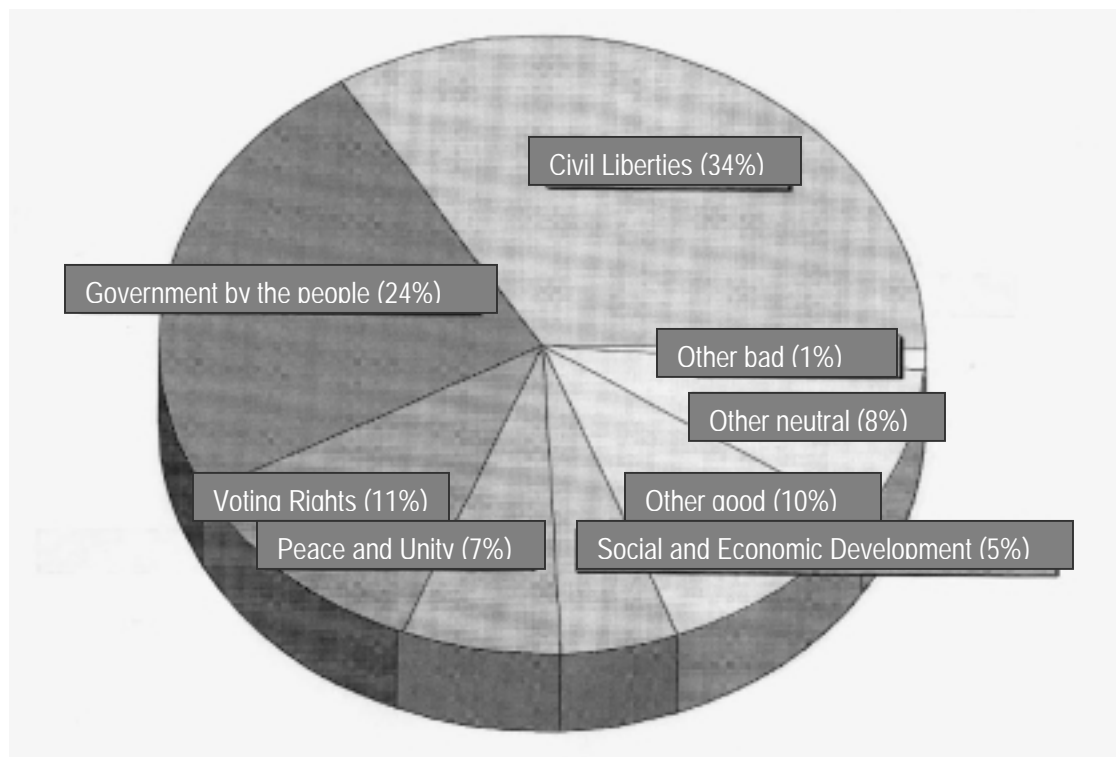
Beyond recognizing democracy, what do people think it means? Because we used an open-ended question, respondents were free to offer answers in their own words. Rather than trying to fit diverse interpretations into predetermined categories, we transcribed all answers verbatim and coded responses after the fact. This inductive procedure was adopted so that we did not overlook any distinctive meanings that Africans might attach to democracy. We were particularly concerned to resist an imported, Western framework and to leave room for indigenous conceptions. As it happens, though, the Africans whom we interviewed seem to have arrived at understandings of democracy that are more universal than culturally specific.

First, with few exceptions, the survey respondents attached a *positive* value to democracy. Among those people aware of the concept^{viii}, more than nine out of ten (91 percent) volunteered a laudatory connotation: democracy was a public “good” that in some way would make conditions “better.” (See Chart 1). Fewer than one out of a hundred (0.8 percent) saw democracy as in some way “bad.” This small minority thought that democratic reforms brought elite corruption, conflict among social interests, or “confusion” in political life. The remainder (8 percent) saw democracy in neutral terms, usually as a “change of government” or as “civilian politics or government” without inferring whether a new regime would be better or worse than what had gone before.

Second, respondents regard democracy in *procedural* as well as *substantive* terms. This finding runs counter to much of the literature, which paints democratization in Africa as a quest for equal social and economic outcomes. This portrayal is usually accompanied by a critique of procedures like constitutional reform and multiparty elections as mere formalities. In Ake’s words. “The democracy movement in Africa gets its impetus from the social and economic aspirations of people in Africa.”^{ix}

Our findings show otherwise. Among the positive meanings of democracy offered by survey respondents, almost seven out of ten (69 percent) refer to political procedures like the protection of human rights, participation in decision-making, and voting in elections. Only one out of five respondents (17 percent) refers to substantive outcomes like peace and unity, social and economic development, and equality and justice.^x Thus, when left unprompted, the majority of Africans interviewed see democracy as a limited, political process rather than as expansive socioeconomic transformation.

Chart 1: The Meaning of Democracy, Selected African Countries, 1999-2000 (percentage, n = 10,184)



Moreover, the rank order of substantive interpretations is revealing: more respondents associate democracy with *political* goods (such as peace, unity, equality, justice, or national independence, which together account for 11 percent of responses) than with *economic* goods (social and economic development, which accounts for just 5 percent). The “peace or unity” responses are particularly interesting since none of the countries in the sample, with the possible exception of Namibia, employed democratic elections to implement a peace agreement.^{xi} One would expect an even closer identification of democracy with peace in countries emerging from civil war.

But the popular meaning of democracy cannot be so easily laid to rest. An alternate question about the components of democracy gave rise to dissonant results. Noting that “people associate democracy with many diverse meanings”, we asked respondents to say whether a list of political and economic features were “essential...for a society to be called ‘democratic’”. The list included (procedural) political features like “majority rule”, freedom to criticize government, and “regular elections”; but it also added (substantive) socioeconomic features like “jobs for everyone”, “equality in education”, and “a small income gap between rich and poor.” In two countries (Botswana and Zimbabwe), respondents rated political and economic attributes as equally essential to democracy. In three other countries (Malawi, Namibia and Nigeria^{xii}), however, respondents rated economic components as significantly more essential than political ones. This finding suggests that African conceptions of democracy include important substantive components of economic delivery and social justice.^{xiii}

Third, popular African conceptions of democracy are, perhaps unexpectedly, quite *liberal*. When open-ended responses are analyzed, people cite civil liberties and personal freedoms more frequently than any other meanings of democracy (34 percent). These represent a conception of democracy based on individual rights that stands in marked contrast to the less than one-in-a-thousand respondents (0.1 percent) who make reference to group rights. Contrary to those who would have us

believe that Africans conceive of democracy and associated rights in a different way than Westerners, our survey respondents are telling us that they place individual rights uppermost.^{xiv} And, to the extent that they claim such rights as a means of resisting repression at the hands of an authoritarian ruler, Africans are beginning to think more like citizens of a constitutional state than clients of a personal patron.

Nevertheless, people use very general terms when they speak of political freedoms, for example referring to “freedom as a birthright”, “the right to everything”, “living freely”, and “control over one’s own life”. These vague associations-- expressed by more than half (56 percent) of those citing civil liberties -- suggests that the popular conception of human rights remains highly undifferentiated. When people do mention specific rights, they overwhelmingly define democracy in terms of freedom of expression, including the freedoms of speech, press and dress. Freedom of expression accounts for 35 percent of the references to civil liberties. All other specific freedoms - of movement, association, property, and religion – together account for only 9 percent. The notion of democracy as a system allowing free speech was particularly prevalent in Ghana, where respondents referred to “being free to talk about the government”, “allowing people to bring out their own views”, and “the ability to say what you think.” Several referred to a democratic system as a deliberative one in which “you say some and let me say some”, which is a direct translation of a well-known Akan saying.

Are there cross-national variations in the way citizens understand democracy? Botswana stands out as the most liberal country with more than half of its citizens (55 percent) identifying democracy with civil and political rights. Nigerians are distinctive insofar as they are almost twice as likely as any other Africans to see democracy as “government by the people” (38 percent).^{xv} That they also associate democracy with voting rights (14 percent) is surely attributable to the recency of the historic transition elections there. Malawi, for its part, is the only country in this sample in which more than one in ten persons (11 percent) offer a substantive definition of democracy. Interestingly, like other Africans, they see democracy’s substance not so much in terms of the delivery of socio-economic development but in term of guarantees of political order and social harmony, which, given the country’s regional rivalries, may reflect wishful thinking.

Finally, the meanings imputed to democracy help us interpret the contrasting levels of democratic awareness noted earlier for Namibia and Malawi. In 1989, a dominant political party came to power in Namibia in a negotiated transition from colonialism that marked the achievement of state sovereignty. As such, Namibians are significantly more likely than other Africans to associate democracy with national independence. By contrast, Malawi’s 1994 transition signaled the collapse of an indigenous single-party monopoly and local demands for open multiparty competition. Thus Malawians (as well as Nigerians and Ghanaians) associate recent events with the installation of democracy rather than with decolonization.

Support for Democracy

To assess support for democracy, the Afrobarometer poses a standard question that has been employed in Barometer surveys in Western Europe, Latin America and the former Soviet bloc. It asks: “Which one of these statements do you most agree with?: A. Democracy is preferable to any other form of government; B. In certain situations, a non-democratic government can be preferable; or C. For someone like me, it doesn’t matter what form of government we have”. Those persons who find democracy to be the best form of government (Option A) were deemed to support democracy.

By this measure, more than seven out of ten people interviewed in six African countries (75 percent) identified themselves as supporters of democracy. This average figure is high by global standards, for example when compared with mean scores recorded in 1995 for six Eastern and Central European countries (65 percent) and four Latin American countries (63 percent).^{xvi} The apparent strength

of public commitment to democracy in Africa can be explained in good part by the exceptional levels of support in just two countries: Botswana and Nigeria. If these two countries are excluded, and South Africa is brought into the sample, then support for democracy is almost identical in sub-Saharan African countries and in other new democracies.^{xvii}

Botswana has the highest levels of popular support for democracy so far found in any African country (82 percent) (see Table 1). This appreciative public mood probably reflects a mature and rational assessment that the country's stable political regime based on regular elections has served it well over a period of almost 40 years. By contrast, the high level of public support for democracy in Nigeria (81 percent) is hardly based upon an extended experience with competitive elections and good governance. More likely, it reflects popular euphoria over the restoration of civilian rule after the country had suffered through a particularly corrupt and repressive interlude of military dictatorship. While a jubilant mood prevailed at the time of the survey (January 2000) – just half a year after the inauguration of an elected government – there is no guarantee that high levels of support for democracy can be sustained indefinitely. Note also that support for democracy in Nigeria varies by region, reflecting a power shift in 1999 from the north to the south. While support for democracy is high throughout the country, it is markedly higher in the south (86 percent, higher even than Botswana) than in the north (75 percent, which matches the continental standard).^{xviii}

Other country features stand out. For example, Malawians display much more nostalgia for authoritarian rule than other Africans in the sample: fully one out of five respondents in Malawi (22 percent) agree that “in certain situations, a non-democratic government can be preferable.” These longings for the past vary significantly by region; they are most prevalent in Malawi's Central Region (30 percent), the homeland and political base of Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, the country's former strongman.^{xix} Also notable are the Namibians who admit that they “don't know” whether they support democracy (20 percent), a figure four times higher than for other African countries in the sample. This finding not only confirms the limited mass awareness of democracy in Namibia, but also the existence of popular doubts about whether the *de facto* one-party regime that is emerging there is really a democracy at all.

Ghana and Zimbabwe are in the middle range of popular commitment to democracy. Yet, at the time of the surveys, each country was embarked on a very different political trajectory: Ghana was in the process of completing an extended transition from military to democratic rule on the basis of increasingly open elections; and Zimbabwe was descending into political crisis at the hands of a dictator bent on retaining power by openly flouting the rule of law. Under such divergent circumstances, it is perhaps surprising that the mass electorates in these countries would express such similar levels of commitment to democracy. This finding (together with the finding about high levels of public support for democracy in the contrasting cases of Botswana and Nigeria) suggests that African citizens make separate judgments about democracy as a preferred political system and the imperfect democratic status of their governments of the day.

Opposition to Non-Democratic Alternatives

To explore this issue further, we probed popular appraisals of alternative political regimes.^{xx} Democracy was presented as a concrete regime form, described as “our present system of government with regular elections and many parties” and was contrasted to the “previous regime”, whether colonial, one-party or military. Using such comparisons, Ghanaians rated democracy (6.7 on a scale of 1-10) well above “the former system of military rule” (just 3.6 on the same scale). Malawians, however, granted the new regime, which permits multiparty elections, only a slightly higher rating than the old one-party system (6.1 versus 5.4 on a scale of 1-10).

We also asked about future alternatives. In the Afrobarometer surveys, respondents were informed that “some people say that we would be better off if the country was governed differently,” and were asked: “What do you think about the following alternatives to our current system of government?” A list of statements was then presented about military rule (“the army should come in to govern the country”), one-man rule (“we should abolish parliament and political parties so that the president can decide everything”), one-party rule (“candidates from only one political party should be allowed to stand for elections and hold office”), rule by traditional leaders (“all decisions should be made by a council of elders, traditional leaders, or chiefs”), and rule by technocrats (“the most important decisions, for example on the economy, should be left to experts”).

Clear patterns emerge when regime preferences are probed this way. Generally, we can reconfirm that Africans who live in new democracies wish to retain their current political regimes. And they roundly reject non-democratic alternatives (see Table 1).

Military government is the least popular form of rule, being rejected by an average 81 percent of respondents in the six countries surveyed. This average is pulled up by Nigeria, where fully 90 percent said “never again” to a form of government that they now associate with the abuses of General Sani Abacha. The prospect that “the army should come in to govern the country” was eschewed with almost equal vehemence in Ghana (89 percent) and Botswana (85 percent). By contrast, only a modest majority of Namibians (59 percent) opposed the prospect of soldiers seizing political power. This suggests that, while neither Botswana nor Namibia have ever experienced a coup, citizens of Botswana would be much less likely than their Namibian counterparts to tolerate one if it ever occurred.

Africans also disavow rule by big men and single parties. Generally, they seem to see one-man rule and one-party rule as inseparable regime forms; very similar majorities shun these options (both 76 percent).^{xxi} But cross-country comparisons reveal interesting differences. In Botswana, Ghana and Zimbabwe, slightly more respondents oppose one-man rule than oppose one-party rule. This may indicate that, in these countries, all of which have relatively well developed political institutions by African standards, citizens are becoming more attached to political institutions than to individual leaders.^{xxii} Malawi, Namibia and Nigeria display a different pattern, with slightly more respondents opposing one-party rule than opposing one-man rule. Indeed, only a slim majority of Namibians (56 percent) opposes a strongman option. Other things equal, these seem to be places in Africa where personalistic politics are most deeply entrenched and pose the biggest threat to the health of new democracies.

In searching for political regimes appropriate to Africa, we asked about the contemporary relevance of traditional authority. Would citizens countenance a return to decision-making by chiefs or a council of elders? Interestingly, in all countries where this question was asked, survey respondents were less resistant to this option than to military or one-party rule. Opposition to traditional rule tended to be weakest in countries where citizens were either geographically isolated or politically alienated from central authority (namely Namibia and Zimbabwe). Opposition to traditional rule was strongest where chiefs actually retained practical powers, formal or informal, over decision-making (e.g. Botswana and Ghana). Ironically, therefore, those who had experienced the involvement of traditional leaders in modern governance, were most likely to express reservations. And, overall, twice as many respondents repudiated a traditional regime as supported it.

The most demanding measure of anti-authoritarian sentiment is the summary percentage of citizens who reject *all* the non-democratic alternatives put to them. There was considerable variation in the sub-Sahara region on this measure. At the time of the first round of Afrobarometer surveys, Nigerians were most dismissive of the full range of authoritarian alternatives (76 percent). By this

measure, Botswana (61 percent) resembled the citizens of consolidating new democracies in Eastern and Central Europe, whereas Namibians (36 percent), like the denizens of various former Soviet republics, were the most willing to flirt with hardline alternatives. Public opinion in the remaining African countries (Malawi, Ghana, Zimbabwe) was essentially split on whether to accept or reject any non-democratic alternative. As such, one cannot be completely certain that public support for authoritarian restorations could not, at some future time, be revived.

Nor do Africans reject technocratic governance. In almost all countries surveyed, citizens consistently favored a system of government in which “the most important decisions, for example on the economy, should be left to experts.” Rule by civilian technocrats won majority approval in five out of the six countries, the only regime form, apart from democracy, to gain such support. And indeed, unlike other alternative regimes, technocratic governance of the economy is not inconsistent with democracy. But this finding indicates that African citizens do not feel confident in their understandings of the operations of the national economy, a realm of endeavor that they would rather leave to others who they deem more qualified. It also suggests that, if national leaders choose to pursue an orthodox economic management strategy that requires the insulation of technical decisions from popular pressures, they will encounter little mass objection.

The Extent of Democracy

Do Africans think that their own countries are governed democratically? To find out, the Afrobarometer surveys asked respondents whether their countries were: A. completely democratic? B. democratic, but with minor problems? C. democratic but with major problems? or D. not a democracy?

Nowhere did a simple majority of respondents think that the current regime in their country was completely democratic (See Table 1). Even in Botswana only a plurality (46 percent) perceived democratization to have been fully achieved, but the overwhelming majority thought that democracy was either “complete” or incomplete only in “minor” respects (82 percent). In Ghana, where the question was asked in a more compact form, 69 percent thought that the country was a democracy, whereas 12 percent thought that it was not.

These cases, which show some evidence of gradual regime consolidation, stand in marked contrast to Namibia and Nigeria. In Namibia, a plurality of respondents (42 percent) thought that the country was “democratic, but with minor problems.” In Nigeria, the largest group (46 percent) was less optimistic, finding the country “democratic, but with major problems.” This last assessment strikes us as intuitively reasonable, especially given the tremendous challenges of recovery and development that an elected Nigerian government must confront with untested democratic institutions. While Nigerians say they support democracy at almost the same levels as Botswana, perceptions of the extent of democracy are exactly inverse. To wit, the same proportion of Nigerians see “major problems” with their democracy as Botswana who see their democracy as “complete.”

This brings us to Zimbabwe, the exception among the countries studied here. A majority of citizens here (55 percent) either think that Zimbabwe is “not a democracy” or say they “don’t know” or “don’t understand.” The proportion of Zimbabweans who think that their country is not a democracy (38 percent) is three times larger than in Malawi (12 percent) and almost 40 times larger than in Nigeria (1 percent). And the proportion of Zimbabweans who “don’t know” (17 percent) far exceeds the equivalent proportion in Namibia, a country already noted for having the lowest levels of popular awareness of democracy in the sample. We suspect that, far from being oblivious to the meaning of democracy, many Zimbabweans simply have a hard time thinking of their own country in these terms during a period of enforced one-party dominance.

Satisfaction with Democracy

At best, then, most of ‘the people’ regard democracy in Africa as a work in progress. Because actual regimes imperfectly reflect citizen preferences, their performance may or may not induce popular satisfaction. Much depends on whether individuals judge the accomplishments of the new order against recollections of a previous regime’s record or against a yardstick of future expectations. If the former, democracy may appear as the lesser of two evils; if the latter, democracy is destined to always fall short.

At this juncture, we draw a sharp distinction between *support* for democracy and *satisfaction* with democracy. The former refers to a judgment in the abstract about one’s preferred form of political system. The latter refers to an assessment of the concrete performance of elected regimes. We also note that, because satisfaction with democracy is a much more corporeal standard, it almost always lags support for democracy wherever it has been measured around the world. The Afrobarometer surveys track satisfaction with democracy by asking the standard question: “Generally, how satisfied are you with the way that democracy works in (your country)?”. Respondents are offered the options of “very satisfied”, “fairly satisfied”, “fairly unsatisfied” and “very unsatisfied”. (In the discussion that follows, we describe as “satisfied” all those who answered either “fairly satisfied” or “very satisfied”).

These results reveal the widest variation in attitudes reported so far. At one extreme is Nigeria, where 84 percent of adults interviewed were satisfied with democracy; at the other extreme stands Zimbabwe, where only 18 percent were so satisfied (See Table 1). This stark antithesis is best interpreted as a contrast between populations either celebrating a long-awaited transition to democracy or bemoaning the intransigence of an entrenched autocracy. Expressions of satisfaction with democracy are subject to the exigencies of regime life cycles and must be regarded as much more volatile than other, more stable attitudes like support for democracy. The level of satisfaction in Nigeria could gradually erode, for example, if the Obasanjo administration fails to live up to popular expectations. Similarly, if Robert Mugabe’s ZANU-PF party had been defeated in the June 2000 elections, Zimbabweans might now be willing to express more satisfaction with democracy.

Other countries are arrayed between these extremes. In terms of the proportion of people professing themselves “very satisfied” with democracy, Botswana (32 percent, the highest in the sample) actually exceeds Nigeria (26 percent). Again, this points to a populace whose attitudes to democracy are based upon an accumulated set of positive experiences. And Ghana scores lower on satisfaction than its relatively high scores on awareness of, and support for, democracy would lead one to expect.

When calculated as a mean for all respondents across six countries, popular satisfaction with democracy averages 64 percent. This cross-national average is inflated by the presence of Nigeria with its high satisfaction scores and large sample size. Satisfaction with democracy drops to 59 percent if sample sizes are standardized by calculating satisfaction as an average of aggregate country scores (that is, controlling for the large size of the Nigeria sample). And satisfaction declines further still to 51 percent if we set aside the two countries (Nigeria and Namibia) where, countering global patterns, citizens report more satisfaction than support. Most importantly, satisfaction with democracy lags support for democracy in the African cases. And the gap is wider in Africa than in Eastern and Central Europe and in South America.^{xxiii} We interpret this to mean not only that African citizens have inflated expectations of democracy but also that African governments often are unable to satisfy them.

From Satisfaction to Support

Does satisfaction with democracy in practice drive overall support for democracy? One might expect that popular assessments of an elected regime's performance would deeply influence whether citizens opt for democracy as their preferred form of government.

The African data support this proposition, though less strongly than expected. Support is positively related to satisfaction in five out of the six countries surveyed (see Table 2). If “don't knows” are excluded, 58 percent of all respondents are both supportive of, and satisfied with, democracy. Yet, although this relationship is statistically significant in all five country cases, it is strong only in Malawi. And in Zimbabwe (where the sign on the correlation coefficient is negative), the relationship runs counter to the predicted direction, with high levels of support coinciding with low levels of satisfaction.

Table 2: The Relationship between Support for Democracy and Satisfaction with Democracy
(percentages of national samples, without “don't knows”)¹

	Support Democracy		Support Any Alternative Regime ²		Pearson r
	Satisfied with Democracy	Unsatisfied with Democracy	Satisfied with Democracy	Unsatisfied with Democracy	
Malawi	53	22	13	13	.337***
Namibia	54	18	17	11	.181***
Ghana	53	26	10	11	.170***
Botswana	70	17	7	6	.136***
Nigeria	72	11	14	6	.133***
Zimbabwe	15	59	8	17	-.142***
All	58	21	12	10	.149***

*** p = <.001

1. Figures may not agree with Table 1 because “don't knows” are removed in Table 2. Row percentages may not add up exactly to 100 due to rounding.

2. Includes those who support non-democratic alternatives and those for whom the type of regime “does not matter”.

We interpret these data as follows. On one hand, popular support for democracy in at least five African countries has a strong instrumental component. Citizens extend support to the regime in democracy in good part because they are satisfied with its performance at delivering desired goods and services. But 21 percent of all survey respondents (and 59 percent in Zimbabwe) say that they support democracy *even though* they are dissatisfied with the performance of their own regime. These citizens value democracy intrinsically, that is, not so much as a means of delivering development, but as an end in itself.

These results cast new light on the quality of the democracy emerging in African countries. Take Zimbabwe, for example, which harbors the most “dissatisfied democrats”. Zimbabweans apparently cling intensely to democracy precisely because their current government has broken most of the rules of the democratic game. Thus intrinsic support for the principle of democracy is best revealed in regimes in crisis, when citizens have abandoned all pretense of instrumental support for an under-performing incumbent government. There is also evidence of intrinsic support for democracy in Ghana. Three-fourths of Ghanaians endorse democracy even though only one-half of them are satisfied with the way it works in practice. In other words, the quality of the “democracy” they have experienced under soldier-turned-civilian Jerry Rawlings falls short of the ideal regime they would prefer. Such intrinsic

attachments suggest that the quality of democracy is relatively well-established in Ghana, a country that once led Africa to political independence.

Table 2 should not be read as raising reservations about Botswana, which our surveys portray as the paragon of African democracies. Even though this country has the highest levels of expressed support for democracy in the sample, most of this support appears on the surface to be instrumental. At this time, we do not know if high levels of instrumental satisfaction in Botswana mask high underlying levels of intrinsic support. Nor can this issue be resolved unless the regime undergoes a period of crisis. Should economic or political performance ever take a serious turn for the worse, and should public attachments to democracy falter in response, then democracy in this country would have been revealed to be less secure than commonly thought. More likely, as in Zimbabwe, citizen attachments to democracy in Botswana will then be revealed as being deep-seated.

Finally, Nigeria and Namibia are interesting anomalies. They are the only two countries in Africa -- and possibly the world -- where more citizens reported satisfaction with democracy than support for it. In these countries, even people who do not support democracy in principle stand ready and willing to consume the products of a regime that calls itself democratic. Citizens here seem to be instrumentalists *par excellence*. Many of them apparently care less about the form of government than about the capacity of rulers -- any rulers -- to deliver the goods. Under circumstances where the attachments of citizens to democracy are largely conditional, we are tempted to conclude that the consolidation of democracy is a distant prospect in both these countries.

POPULAR ATTITUDES TO MARKETS

Awareness of Adjustment

We have established that the Africans we interviewed know a good deal about democratization reforms. But are they also alert to the second strand in the dual transition? Are they aware of the economic reform package commonly referred to as structural adjustment? To find out, we asked, "Have you ever heard anything about the government's structural adjustment program, or haven't you had a chance to hear about this yet". The most common name for this program (e.g. the Economic Recovery Program [ERP] in Ghana, the Economic Structural Adjustment Program [ESAP] in Zimbabwe) was inserted for each country. If respondent's seemed uncertain, a prompt was added: "you know, the reforms to the economy introduced in the 1980s/1990s."

We found considerable diversity across countries in awareness of adjustment (See Table 3). At the low end, only four out of ten Nigerians (40 percent) could remember ever having heard about structural adjustment, compared to more than twice as many in Zimbabwe (85 percent). The Nigerian results are somewhat surprising considering the extensive public debate that surrounded the introduction of a market-oriented policy program by the government of Ibrahim Babangida in 1986. The ESAP was introduced more recently in Zimbabwe (1990) and the ESAP terminology has become incorporated into public discourse, including pop songs.^{xxiv} Moreover, the Zimbabwean government repeatedly blamed the country's economic downturn on the Washington-based international financial institutions, a smokescreen that could not be blown by the Nigerian government, which claimed that its reforms were home-grown.

**Table 3: Popular Attitudes to Markets,
Selected African Countries, 1999-2000**
(percentages of national samples, including “don’t knows”)

	Ghana	Malawi	Nigeria	Zimbabwe
KNOWLEDGE OF ADJUSTMENT. Have you ever heard about the government’s (insert the name of the country’s) structural adjustment program? (percentage of respondents saying “yes”)	42	51	40	85
RESPONSIBILITY FOR WELL-BEING A. People should look after themselves and be responsible for their own success in life. B. The government should bear the main responsibility for ensuring the well-being of people. (percentage who agree “somewhat” or “strongly”)	56 44	73 25	42 56	37 59
SUPPORT USER FEES. A. It is better to raise educational/health standards*, even if we have to pay fees B. It is better to have free schooling/health care* for our children, even if the quality is low. (percentage who agree “somewhat” or “strongly”)	72 28	48 44	69 27	58 34
SUPPORT INSTITUTIONAL REFORM . A. The government cannot afford so many public employees and should lay some of them off. B. All civil servants should keep their jobs, even if paying their salaries is costly to the country. (percentage who agree “somewhat” or “strongly”)	28 72	21 73	19 73	51 41
PERCEIVED EQUITY EFFECTS OF ADJUSTMENT. The government’s economic policies have helped most people; only a few have suffered. The government’s economic policies have hurt most people and only benefitted a few (percentage who agree “somewhat” or “strongly”)	32 68	11 32	34 60	7 78
SATISFACTION WITH ADJUSTMENT. How satisfied are you with the (insert the name of the country’s) structural adjustment program? (percentage of knowledgeable respondents saying “somewhat” or “very” satisfied)	34	19	16	4

* The question referred to education services in Ghana and Nigeria and health services in Malawi and Nigeria.

On average, in the four countries where this question was asked, respondents were evenly split on awareness of the national economic reform program: 49 percent had heard of it and 51 percent had not. From the perspective of policy-makers, this must be read as a disappointing result. After two decades of a sustained international effort to induce African governments to reorient African economies toward the market, one-half of intended beneficiaries claim to be ignorant that such a strategy even exists.

Of course, low levels of name recognition may reflect the shifting and cryptic labels attached to adjustment programs, such as the change from ERP to SAP in Ghana (with a detour into a social safety net program called PAMSCAD). A lack of mass familiarity with economic policies may also reflect the fact that some African governments have only partially adopted market reforms and implemented them inconsistently. Or the economic reforms and accompanying public discourse that occurred in the mid 1980s may have become, for some citizens, historical events. In Ghana, for example, which in 1983 was first among present countries to launch a comprehensive adjustment program, young

people are less economically conscious than their elders.^{xxv} Moreover, because SAPs address complex macroeconomic policy questions, awareness also varies greatly by education.^{xxvi}

Even if SAP terminology is not broadly recognizable, citizens may still know what sectoral policies are supposed to achieve. Moreover, to the extent that particular reforms are actually implemented, people have experienced the effects of adjustment at first hand. We now explore these propositions.

Knowledge of Adjustment

In Ghana and Nigeria we asked people, “what, in your opinion, is the SAP^{xxvii} supposed to do?” Only one-third of respondents in either country (35 percent in Nigeria, 34 percent in Ghana) could venture an answer. These figures stand in marked contrast to the 74 percent of citizens (the average for six countries) who could attach a meaning to democracy.

Like democracy, however, adjustment is viewed positively. Among those persons who are aware of SAPs, less than one out of fifty (2 percent in Ghana, 1 percent in Nigeria) made reference to negative purposes. To be sure, a handful of people thought that the objects of adjustment were “to bring hardship and difficulties”, “to increase inflation”, or “to benefit the rich”. But over 98 percent cited positive goals, a remarkable finding in light of emotional debates about the appropriateness of market reforms to Africa. Contrary to the conventional wisdom that “the people” regard adjustment in a derogatory light, we find that most knowledgeable Ghanaians and Nigerians seem to associate adjustment reforms with affirmative economic objectives.

What are these affirmative objectives? Two stand out: “to improve the economy” and “to improve living conditions”. Whereas Ghanaians name improvements in the macro-economy (46 percent) ahead of improvements in the conditions of individuals (31 percent), Nigerians put these purposes in reverse order (25 percent and 29 percent respectively). On one hand, these responses suggest that most well-informed citizens recognize that, even if the medicine of adjustment is bitter, SAPs are designed to bring about economic recovery. On the other hand, these responses also indicate that popular comprehension of the purposes of adjustment is loose at best. Respondents usually described the purposes of adjustment in terms that were even sketchier than their sometimes vague interpretations of democracy. Very few respondents associated SAP with specific measures like fiscal stabilization, the liberalization of prices, the promotion of exports, privatization, and public sector reform. Fewer than three percent of the adults in either country tendered any one of these goals. An impression arises from these figures of extremely low popular levels of economic literacy.

Support for Market Values

Even if hazy about the exact content of adjustment policies, people still hold basic economic values. We wondered where Africans position themselves in the great debates about state and market. Do they see themselves as autonomous economic actors or do they rely on government as the chief provider of public well-being?

In this regard, respondents were asked to make a choice on a standard survey item that is used in values surveys worldwide: Either “A. People should be responsible for their own success in life,” or “B. Government should bear the main responsibility for ensuring the well-being of people.” Because this item is the core correlate in an economic values scale, it neatly summarizes the orientation of citizens to economic values generally.

By this criterion, Africans seem to be caught between state and market. On average, in the six countries surveyed, 52 percent believe in individual responsibility and 44 percent think that government is accountable for public well-being.^{xxviii} These figures can be usefully compared with the responses to a similar item posed in seven former Soviet republics in 1989, where the surveyed population was also of two minds. But their preference order was reversed, with a slight majority of Soviet citizens (51 percent) favoring government provision over individual responsibility (49 percent).^{xxix} Thus, even during an era of democratization, significant proportions of the population in both world regions continue to turn to the state in the hope of obtaining socioeconomic welfare. At the margins, however, Africans seem slightly more willing to entertain the prospect of individual self-reliance than Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians, and the residents of Baltic and Central Asian states.

Beneath the African averages, however, lie sharp cross-national differences (see Table 3). Support for individual responsibility is highest in Malawi (73 percent) and lowest in Zimbabwe, where a clear majority (59 percent) regard the government as responsible for public welfare. This distinction in popular attitudes may reflect the recent fiscal health of each government. In some African countries (like Malawi and Ghana), the government has long lacked the budgetary capacity to deliver mass benefits, whereas in others (like Zimbabwe and Nigeria) it has enjoyed access to reliable flows of foreign exchange. Thus citizens are responding rationally when they say they prefer to fend for themselves in the former countries but to make claims on the state in the latter countries.

The more we probed into general economic values, the more that attitudes of self-reliance and entrepreneurship were revealed. More people consider that “the best way to create jobs is to encourage people to start their own businesses” (54 percent) than who think that “the government should provide employment for everyone who wants to work” (42 percent).^{xxx} Fully 77 percent agreed that, in order to make a business succeed, people “should invest their own savings or borrow,” against just 18 percent who felt that “there is no sense in trying to start a new business because it might lose money.”

At the same time, questions about the division of public-private responsibility in various sectors revealed a persistent statism. This was particularly true in relation to the distribution of investments in socio-economic development. Across all countries, respondents were agreed that government had the prime responsibility for providing agricultural credit (66 percent) and building schools and clinics (65 percent). Respondents also supported, though more equivocally, a lead role for government in marketing the country’s main export commodity^{xxxi} (53 percent) and controlling crime (52 percent). Only with regard to the construction of housing did they consistently prefer the private sector (individuals and companies) or public-private partnerships, rather than the government (26 percent).

In almost all sectors of all countries surveyed, people expressed doubt about the ability of private enterprise to replace public provision. Only tiny minorities thought that market-based institutions should be held responsible for delivering export marketing services (14 percent), agricultural credit (6 percent), or schools and clinics (3 percent). Given the abject failure of state marketing boards across the continent, it is surprising that more Africans have not embraced private sector solutions in the export commodity sectors. Solid minorities support open markets for agricultural inputs and products only in Malawi and Botswana (30 percent and 19 percent respectively), perhaps because private entrepreneurs are available to service at least some rural areas in these countries. Elsewhere, only a handful of respondents are willing to put faith in open markets for agricultural outputs (9 percent in Ghana and 5 percent in Botswana), probably due to a fear that private buyers will either not materialize, or pay only low prices, when farmers have produce to sell.

In short, while respondents know that the state lacks administrative capacity, they consider that the private sector is less reliable still. As such, at least in the six countries surveyed, Africans remain ambiguous at best about the viability of markets.

Support for Adjustment Policies

This does not mean that the debate about structural adjustment in Africa should be cast in black-and-white terms. Without the benefit of much empirical evidence, commentators often assert that Africans are either “for” or “against” (usually “against”) adjustment. But structural adjustment is a complex package of reforms that citizens need not accept or reject wholesale. Accordingly, we wondered whether survey respondents would support to some policy items in the adjustment program but reject others.

We framed four straightforward questions on particular adjustment policies that ordinary folk might have encountered. The first concerned user fees. Do you prefer “to have free schooling/health care even if the quality of services is low”? Or do you prefer “to raise educational/health standards, even if (you) have to pay fees”? The results are striking and consistent (See Table 3). In every country, more people supported the payment of user fees for improved services than opposed them (on average over six countries, 62 percent versus 33 percent). Willingness to pay one’s own way was most evident in Ghana (72 percent) and least evident in Malawi (48 percent). This discrepancy is partly explicable in terms of the contrasting policies adopted in each country: for example, President Rawlings of Ghana began to introduce charges for junior secondary schooling as early as 1986, whereas President Muluzi of Malawi campaigned as recently as 1999 on a platform of free primary education.

Second, we asked about market prices for consumer goods. Is it “better to have goods available in the market even if the prices are high”? Or, is it “better to have low prices even if there are shortages of goods”? A similar pattern emerged of support for market-based policies, though more ambiguously and at lower levels of support. On average, more persons preferred the free play of market forces in setting consumer prices (54 percent) than wanted to retain consumer subsidies (36 percent). But quite a few people were undecided on this question, especially in Namibia (15 percent). Moreover, Malawi and Zimbabwe bucked the general trend, with more people preferring low consumer goods prices, even at the risk of shortages. Again, the formation of these opinions probably derives from the recent economic history of each country. Malawi and Zimbabwe have never experienced shortages as a consequence of the over-subsidization of basic commodities in a centrally planned economy. By contrast, Ghana and Zambia experienced repeated policy-induced shortages of consumer goods during the 1980s. The memory of these interludes of deprivation is apparently sufficient to induce citizens in these two countries to now opt strongly for allowing the market to set prices (an identical 72 percent in Ghana in 1999 and in Zambia in an earlier survey in 1996).^{xxxii}

Third, we quizzed respondents about privatization. The question was again worded as a choice. Should the government “retain ownership of its factories, businesses and farms,” or should it “sell its businesses to private companies and individuals”? On this question, the pendulum of public opinion swung away from the market and back towards the state. In five out of six countries, more people favor state ownership over privatization, the only exception being Botswana, where a plurality favored privatization (48 percent versus 36 percent). On average, 57 percent of the Africans interviewed want to retain state ownership and only 35 percent support the sale of public corporations. In contrast to earlier results, however, Malawians now resemble Ghanaians in their strong rejection of privatization. To explore the issue of privatization in greater depth, further dis-aggregation may be necessary by sector. Focus groups conducted with opinion leaders in Ghana in March 2000 suggest that these citizens favor privatization in some sectors (e.g. broadcasting) but resist it in others (e.g. electricity).^{xxxiii}

Finally, we asked about the restructuring of the public service. Should “all civil servants keep their jobs, even if paying their salaries is costly to the country”? Or, since “the government cannot afford so many public employees, (should it) lay some of them off”? This choice evoked the most ardent anti-reform reaction (see Table 3). Across six countries, two out of three respondents (an average of 67 percent) rejected retrenchment of the public service and only one-quarter (25 percent) extended support. The strongest pro-state sentiment was found in Botswana and Malawi, both small countries with long-standing traditions of public employment on which many extended family networks depend. The only exception was Zimbabwe, where more people (a slim majority of 51 percent) support retrenchment than oppose it (41 percent). This unforeseen finding indicates that Mugabe’s party-state machine has become so bloated that even his erstwhile supporters now think that he has distributed too many patronage posts.

A comment is in order about the intensity of opinions on economic adjustment policies. We know that ‘the people’ in selected sub-Saharan countries are not broadly aware of the existence of official macro-economic adjustment programs and have little intimate knowledge about the objectives of these programs. But they have little difficulty in recognizing policies that have a direct impact on their own economic interests. Most respondents were able to express an opinion when faced with the range of practical policy choices listed above; only a few said they “didn’t know” (between 5 and 10 percent, depending on the question). Instead, respondents felt strongly about adjustment as evidenced by the clustering of responses (whether “pro” or “con”) towards the “strongly agree” ends of the spectrum.

To close this section, let us summarize the bifurcated attitudes to structural adjustment that have been revealed to date. Far from being wholly for or against economic reforms, most Africans interviewed express discriminating views. In some respects, they support market liberalization. Like the independence generation before them, current cohorts of African citizens continue to place a lofty value on education and health care, to the point of even being willing to pay school and clinic fees. To a lesser extent, most citizens will even accept market pricing for consumer goods perhaps because, under adjustment policies, so many more of them have become private traders in the small-scale, informal economy.

Against this toleration for “getting the prices right,” we note also a strong resistance to the reform of economic institutions. The majority of respondents in our surveys expressed strong attachment to the supply of developmental goods and services by the state. The key issue here is the persistent role of the state as the principal provider of employment in African countries. Even if public sector salaries are in decline, the rents and perquisites associated with public office are apparently still attractive. Through opposition to privatization and public service retrenchments, citizens indicate that they do not believe that the private sector, whether driven by international investment or small-scale enterprise, can deliver a reliable supply of remunerative jobs. Until the free market can demonstrate that it will perform better at job creation than even an enfeebled state, Africans would rather seemingly stick with the devil they know.

Satisfaction with Adjustment

How, then, do citizens judge the performance of structural adjustment programs?^{xxxiv} Most Africans interviewed (68 percent across the four countries where the question was asked) are unsatisfied with the changes they attribute to the government’s economic reform program. An absolute majority in every country in the sample -- ranging from a bare 53 percent in Ghana to a stunning 92 percent in Zimbabwe -- expressed dissatisfaction with SAPs. To be sure, a substantial proportion (13 percent) claim to be undecided or neutral in their judgments about the effects of adjustment. But, on average, fewer than one in five (18 percent) say they are satisfied, though in Ghana one out of three persons (35 percent) expressed some measure of satisfaction. Thus, though some Ghanaians are cheered by recent economic reforms, almost all Zimbabweans are distressed by them.

On a cautionary note, we wonder whether this indictment of SAPs is a case of mistaken identity. Are people conflating structural adjustment with economic crisis, thereby blaming the medicine for the disease? On one hand, possible evidence exists of this kind of mis-diagnosis: in five out of the six countries surveyed, people who are dissatisfied with the condition of the economy are also very likely to be dissatisfied with SAPs.^{xxxv} On the other hand, when we asked people “who is responsible for...current economic conditions?” we found that people could distinguish between crisis and adjustment. Almost all people blamed economic decline on mismanagement by a previous or current government (83 percent in Ghana and 76 percent in Nigeria). Fewer than 9 percent in Ghana and fewer than 2 percent in Nigeria chose to attribute current economic woes to the SAP or the international financial agencies. Indeed, almost as many people in Nigeria blamed supernatural forces!

Nonetheless, the survey respondents held the view that adjustment has uneven social effects. When asked whether the government’s economic policies had helped or hurt “most people”, most respondents saw increasing inequality (See Table 3). On average, 62 percent of those able to offer a valid answer agreed (“somewhat” or “strongly”) that structural adjustment has *hurt* most people and benefitted few.^{xxxvi} In no African country did a majority of respondents think that adjustment had assisted most folk. The largest vote of confidence in SAPs was mustered in Nigeria where just 34 percent saw broad-based benefits. Even in Ghana, only 32 percent thought that most people had gained, suggesting that prosperity was not trickling down even from the continent’s longest-running economic reform program.

On this theme, respondents thought that, across a range of public tasks, reformist governments did worst of all at “narrowing the income gaps between the rich and the poor”. For example, whereas 64 percent saw the Obasanjo government in Nigeria doing “well” at combating corruption, only 40 percent said the same about its performance at closing income gaps. In Ghana, an even smaller proportion (32 percent) praised the Rawlings government’s handling of income distribution in a context where they gave it much higher marks for controlling crime (57 percent). Caution must be exercised in interpreting the results for Malawi. In this country, more than half the respondents (55 percent) admitted that they “didn’t know” or “couldn’t say” about the social consequences of adjustment. This finding helps to underline the remoteness of the adjustment debate, particularly when it refers to the macro-economy, rather than to the lives of ordinary individuals. But, among those who had an opinion, dissatisfaction was closely correlated with perceptions that adjustment had had an unequal social impact.^{xxxvii}

When we delved into exactly “who benefits?”, the answer was clear. Overwhelming majorities of Nigerians (84 percent) and Ghanaians (74 percent) reported that the benefits of adjustment accrued to “people close to government”. Mentioned in this group were the president, cabinet ministers, senior officers in the party or junta, regional barons appointed by the top leadership, and individuals in the informal circles of power around such leaders. No other category of supposed beneficiary came close. Foreign businesses and “the rich” were cited by only three to five percent of respondents in either country. Interestingly, the unequal impact of adjustment was seen to occur along class rather than communal lines. Only 4 percent of Ghanaians and 3 percent of Nigerians portrayed unfair gains from adjustment in terms of rural-urban or inter-regional differences. When they (rarely) mentioned a region, Ghanaians cited Volta, the homeland of President Jerry Rawlings and Nigerians pointed to Hausaland or “the north.” Instead, a new class of beneficiaries was perceived to have arisen through access to the offices and functionaries of the state.

Thus, in the final analysis, “the people” have strong reservations about structural adjustment. The willingness of Africans to support selected reform policies is not extended to the

economic strategy as a whole. We propose that the Achilles heel of a market-oriented development strategy in Africa is its association in the popular imagination with the intensification of politically-based social inequalities, an issue which we explore further in the next section.

RELATING POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ATTITUDES

To close this chapter, we consider how democracy and markets interact in African public opinion. And we explore several reasons why people accept or reject various reforms. Four lines of inquiry are followed:

- * Are attitudes to political and economic reform *related*?
- * Is support for reform affected by the *meanings* that people attribute to democracy and markets?
- * Are mass attitudes influenced by demographic factors, especially *education*?
- * Do popular concerns about *inequality* undermine support for adjustment and democracy?

No African Consensus

The Washington consensus about the complementarity of democracy and markets is not mirrored by a parallel African consensus. For the most part, attitudes to the two types of reform are unrelated in our surveys. Where a relationship does exist, it points to a process of dual transition whose dynamics are more contradictory than coherent.

To begin with, *support for democracy* in six African countries cannot be predicted from the main economic attitudes examined in this paper. For example, popular attachments to democracy are largely unlinked to mass support for “getting the prices right”. More than seven out of ten respondents regard democracy as the ideal form of government, regardless of whether they support market pricing (79 percent) or oppose it (74 percent). Any observed differences are not statistically significant.^{xxxviii} We suggest that support for democracy is sufficiently widespread that it occurs among *both* adherents *and* opponents of free market reform.

Nor is support for democracy much affected by respondent reactions to the impact of adjustment. More than eight out of ten respondents prefer democracy to authoritarian rule, regardless of whether they are satisfied (84 percent) or unsatisfied (80 percent) with their country’s structural adjustment program. Again, any observed differences are statistically insignificant.^{xxxix} Thus, the legitimacy of democracy is not only widespread, but it is relatively robust. So far, at least, the popularity of the democratic principle in six African countries has withstood the potentially corrosive effects of adjustment fatigue.

An affinity appears between the two types of reform, however, once one moves beyond abstract political values to concrete assessments of regime performance. We find a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between *satisfaction with democracy* and *satisfaction with SAPs*. Fully 83 percent of respondents who are satisfied with their country’s economic reform program are also satisfied with democracy. But only 53 percent who are dissatisfied with SAPs are also satisfied with democracy.^{xl} Thus, the survey respondents hinge their judgments of the performance of democracy in good part on their comfort level with the implementation of adjustment. Widespread disgruntlement with the impact of economic policy reform (on average, only 20 percent across six countries are satisfied with SAPs) is a major factor pulling down the public’s assessment of the performance of democracy.

Adjustment's chilling effect on satisfaction with democracy is observable in every country for which data is available (see Table 4). The effect is strongest in Malawi, where discontent with SAP cuts satisfaction with democracy almost in half. The effect is weakest (but still statistically significant) in Nigeria where, shortly after a landmark political transition, satisfaction with democracy was so widespread that it permeated virtually all social, economic and opinion groups. The pattern is consistent even in Zimbabwe, despite the markedly lower levels of public satisfaction with democracy there. In short, everywhere we looked, we found that economic dissatisfaction depressed political satisfaction.

Table 4: The Relationship between Satisfaction with Democracy and Satisfaction with Adjustment
(percentages of national samples, without "don't knows")

	Satisfied with Democracy		Unsatisfied with Democracy		Pearson r
	Satisfied with SAP	Unsatisfied with SAP	Satisfied with SAP	Unsatisfied with SAP	
Malawi	23	29	4	44	.432***
Ghana	33	32	7	29	.381***
Zimbabwe	2	20	2	76	.228***
Nigeria	16	67	2	15	.077**
All	17	42	3	38	.322***

** <.01

*** <.001

1. Figures may not agree with Tables 1 and 3 because "don't knows" are removed in Table 4. Row percentages may not add up exactly to 100 due to rounding.

Thus, in selected African countries, public opinions about democracy and markets are connected, but not quite in the harmonious and productive ways that advocates of democratic capitalism contend. To be sure, those citizens who report satisfaction with the implementation of structural adjustment measures are likely to say they are also content with the way democracy works. But so few Africans are gratified with SAPs that the introduction of adjustment measures actually undermines democratic satisfaction. Thus, the only reason that democracy and markets can coexist in Africa is because democracy has intrinsic legitimacy of its own, earned quite independently of the performance of economic policies. This feature of democracy is reflected in the significant majorities of Africans across numerous countries who say they *support* democracy *regardless* of what they think of adjustment.

The Eye of the Beholder

To state the obvious, support for reform begins with awareness of the purposes of reform. Individuals who cannot define democracy are much less attached to it as a preferred form of regime. Compared to politically conscious citizens, they are twice as likely to say that "it makes no difference to me what form of government we have."^{xli}

More interestingly, support for democracy and markets is related to the content of popular understandings. In Nigeria, for example, a subset of citizens comprehend structural adjustment to involve measures to instill fiscal discipline, including cutbacks in government's budgetary outlays.^{xlii}

Those who conceive of SAPs this way are also likely to welcome a role for the market in determining the prices of consumer goods (65 percent). By contrast, those who think that adjustment aims to increase the provision of government services are significantly less likely to favor market pricing (53 percent). Thus, individuals who correctly identify economic reform with a reduced role for the state are more prepared to accept the consequences of economic reform.

Similarly, citizens' support for democracy increases if they conceive it in procedural rather than substantive terms.^{xliii} For instance, whereas 81 percent of those who see democracy as "government by the people" name it as the best form of regime; the comparable figure is 73 percent for those who define democracy as "social and economic development", a small but statistically significant difference. Moreover, support for democracy is lowest among those who associate democracy with "social and economic hardship" (56 percent).^{xliv} Thus, support for democracy seems to be centered solidly among minimalists, for whom democracy's scope is limited to setting the rules of the political game, but more tentative among maximalists, who hope that democracy will herald sweeping socio-economic change.

The same applies, but with greater force, to satisfaction with the way that democracy actually works. The most satisfied citizens are those who define democracy in terms of the procedural notion of electoral choice (73 percent). The least satisfied are those who expect democracy to deliver economic equality or social justice (59 percent), social or economic development (58 percent), and security from crime (57 percent), all substantive desires. We conclude that citizens who have modest expectations – namely that democracy will enable them to choose leaders and participate in other decision-making procedures (and not much more!) – are relatively likely to be satisfied with democracy. If, however, they believe that democracy will automatically provide jobs, redistribute income, and ensure social peace, then they are candidates for rapid disillusionment. In short, the perceived performance of democracy and adjustment are partly in the eye of the beholder.

The Impact of Education

A standard prediction in social science is that demographic attributes such as gender, age and income shape mass beliefs. We find that, with the exception of education, such factors have relatively little influence on attitudes to reform in six countries in Africa.

Take gender. Men and women display very similar levels of support for, and satisfaction with, key political and economic reforms, differing only in their awareness of democracy and, especially, markets. Whereas 21 percent of males in the six countries had never heard of democracy, some 31 of females never had.^{xlv} And, whereas 56 percent of men had never heard of their country's structural adjustment program, fully 69 percent of women were similarly uninformed.^{xlvi} These differences survived a statistical control for the respondent's level of education, thereby suggesting a genuine *gender* gap in awareness of the political and economic worlds.

Neither were there any meaningful urban-rural distinctions in attitudes to democracy and markets. Urban and rural dwellers in the six countries support democracy in roughly equal proportions. In five countries (especially Botswana, Nigeria and Zimbabwe) urbanites were more likely to express dissatisfaction with the way democracy was working. But this general finding is offset by results from Malawi, where urbanites were more satisfied with democracy than their country cousins. Given that economic reform programs were intended to correct imbalances in urban-rural terms of trade, one might expect to find greater support for markets and satisfaction with adjustment in rural areas. But urbanites are just as likely as rural dwellers to support market pricing for consumer goods and to be unsatisfied with

the performance of SAPs. We found a significant difference in these attitudes only in Nigeria where, contrary to forecasts, rural dwellers were more dissatisfied with SAPs than city folk.

Of all demographic factors, education has the greatest observed effects on attitudes to reform. Not surprisingly, the higher their educational attainment, the more likely Africans are to be aware of democracy and markets.^{xlvi} For example, nine out of ten persons with university education say they know something about democracy, whereas six out of ten persons with no formal schooling make the same claim. More strikingly still, 91 percent of university post-graduates have heard about a SAP, whereas only 13 percent of persons without schooling have done so.

Unlike in the West, however, education does not seem to build support for democracy in Africa. Post-graduates are no more likely than people who have never been to school to say that democracy is “always preferable.” Indeed, the very highly educated in Africa seem to have qualms about democracy precisely because it endows non-literate citizens with political rights that they fear may be exercised unreflectively or irresponsibly.^{xlvi} Moreover, educated Africans are critical of democracy in practice. Only 10 percent of university post-graduates are “very satisfied” with democracy, compared to 32 percent of those without formal schooling. If educated people are satisfied at all, they are likely to damn with faint praise by saying they are only “fairly” satisfied.

Nevertheless, education does increase sympathy for some aspects of economic reform. The educated elite are more likely to support market pricing for consumer goods and to accept user fees for social services: for example, a strong majority of those with university degrees (71 percent) applaud market pricing compared to a minority of those with some primary schooling (45 percent). Nonetheless, educated people are no more likely than anyone else to support privatization or civil service retrenchment, indicating that this key group of opinion leaders has yet to be convinced of the merits of these institutional reforms. And, while educated people are clearly not satisfied with adjustment, they are somewhat more satisfied than the lesser educated. For instance, some 22 percent of university graduates say they are satisfied with SAPs compared with 14 percent of those with some primary schooling.

In the absence of household income data for all countries, we do not know whether these putative educational effects are actually due to income differentials. The evidence from Ghana and Nigeria is inconclusive. Income and education are not as closely correlated as one would expect^{xli}. And income displaces education in explaining support for market pricing only in Ghana. More research is required.

The Challenge of Equity

We arrive, finally, at the public demand for distributive justice, an issue central to African political cultures. One might guess that, in settings where traditional social values emphasize egalitarianism, community and reciprocity, the legitimization of political and economic regimes would depend on how equitable they are perceived to be.

As noted earlier, public opinion holds that SAPs hurt more people than they help. And citizens clearly associate economic adjustment with perceptions of emerging social inequality. For example, Malawians show above average satisfaction with their country’s adjustment program (46 percent) as long as they think that their new government is treating everybody “equally and fairly”. By contrast, they are far less satisfied with the SAP if they think that, now, people are treated less equally than before (8 percent).^l Take another example. The majority of Ghanaians (61 percent) who think that the government is doing “well” in reducing rich-poor income gaps are also satisfied with the ERP. But only 25 percent who think that the government is handling income gaps “badly” hold a favorable opinion about adjustment.^{li} These are among the strongest relationships found in this study.

Even more critically, perceptions that SAPs widen the gap between the rich and the poor have a negative spillover effect on attitudes to *political* reform. Respondents who think that SAPs help most people are very likely to be satisfied with democracy (84 percent); by contrast, those who think that SAPs hurt most people display much lower levels of political satisfaction (63 percent).^{lii} This relationship is particularly strong in Malawi and Zimbabwe.^{liii} And, whereas those who think that the government is handling income gaps “well” are usually satisfied with democracy (72 percent), those who think that income gaps are being handled “badly” rarely find democracy satisfying (47 percent). This relationship is based on observations from Ghana and Nigeria.^{liv}

Finally, a multi-variate analysis of satisfaction with democracy was conducted for all six countries, using as predictors the variables discussed so far (education, meaning of democracy, satisfaction with SAPs, and perceived equity effects of SAPs). All reported relationships remained highly significant even when controlled for one another.^{lv} Even more importantly, the strongest explanatory factor was satisfaction with SAPs, closely followed by the perception that SAPs have hurt more people than they have helped.^{lvi}

These findings lead us to reverse the conventional argument about the tension between political and economic reform.^{lvii} The threat is not so much that democratization will expose leaders to popular pressures which prevent them from taking the tough measures that economic recovery requires. Rather, popular satisfaction with democracy will be undermined if economic adjustment programs are only partially implemented and, instead, become frozen at a point where the mass public perceives that benefits are accruing unevenly.^{lviii}

CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, we summarize and interpret the snapshot we have taken of attitudes to democratic and market reforms from a first round of Afrobarometer surveys conducted in six African countries in 1999-2000.

“The people” in these countries say they are much more aware of political than economic regimes, of democracy rather than markets. Democratic values have been absorbed into popular political attitudes and discourse. But market liberalization (as a comprehensive strategy for economic recovery) has yet to fully capture the popular imagination.

Democracy, broadly defined, has already attained wide legitimacy, with more than seven out of ten African respondents naming it as their preferred form of government. Because previous regimes of military and one-party rule are no longer popular in large parts of the continent, support for democracy is not presently compromised by large pockets of authoritarian nostalgia. While perhaps a mile wide, support for democracy in Africa may be only an inch deep. Many people express extremely vague understandings of democratic values and procedures, regard the new regimes in their countries as seriously incomplete, and express low levels of satisfaction with the practical performance of elected governments.

Nor is economic adjustment endorsed with anything like the same exuberance as democracy. While a majority of survey respondents support “getting the prices right,” the Africans we interviewed generally abjure reforms to the existing architecture of economic institutions. Resistance to market liberalization is unusual given the African genius for trade, whether in its historical long-distance form or its contemporary guise as the informal sector. But such resistance is driven by a deep-seated popular conviction that market institutions, especially in their current globalized form, cannot provide

employment and development services with the same effectiveness and equity as even corrupt and hollowed-out states.

We conclude that Africans participate in the global shifts toward democracy and markets for dissimilar reasons. Support for political liberalization is a primarily indigenous sentiment, which arose as a popular quest for accountable government quite independently of political conditions attached to foreign aid.^{lix} Economic liberalization, by contrast, remains a largely exotic project, promoted more feverishly by Africa's donors and lenders and negotiated only with African elites. And while educated people within Africa have acted as vectors for the dissemination of awareness about democracy, they remain too ambiguous about adjustment to serve as opinion leaders in this realm.

Will scepticism about market reforms undermine democracy in Africa? The jury is still out on this important question.

On one hand, the Afrobarometer surveys point to an intrinsic core of popular support for democracy in many countries that is unaffected by instrumental judgments about regime performance. The intrinsic core is most vividly revealed in countries in political and economic crisis, but it underpins support for democracy in many other places too. Moreover, opponents of market principles and adjustment reforms do not denigrate democracy; in fact, they support democracy at unexpectedly high levels. Thus, for the moment, it is hard to identify an economically-based social segment on which an anti-democratic movement could be mounted. Perhaps a constituency of this sort will arise in time among democracy's initial supporters who become disillusioned with regime performance at economic delivery. As of 1999, however, even those persons who were unsatisfied with economic reform were still likely to report satisfaction with democracy.

But the surveys also show clearly that satisfaction with democracy declines when citizens disdain the content and consequences of official economic policy. To the extent that it has an instrumental base, support for democracy is therefore susceptible to erosion if adjustment measures are introduced ahead of the pace at which citizens feel comfortable. Even if citizens express tolerance for a measure of price reform, they still want state institutions to provide employment and essential services. They also insist loudly that policy reform should broadly benefit common people rather than accumulate in the hands of state elites. In principle, democracy puts in place the procedures for holding state elites accountable. Governments that are responsive to "the people" should, in turn, be relatively more effective at alleviating equity concerns. Through the course of our survey research, we have come to believe that, reciprocally, the very survival of infant democracies requires that elected leaders attend closely to the popular demand for social justice.

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Endnotes

- ⁱ We situate our African survey results in the grand tradition of comparative empirical research on mass political attitudes. The revived debates in this field are skillfully summarized in Norris (ed.), *Critical Citizens*, 1999.
- ⁱⁱ The sample sizes for each country are as follows: Botswana = 1200, Ghana = 2004, Malawi = 1208, Namibia = 1183, Nigeria = 3603, and Zimbabwe = 1200. The authors are grateful for research funding from the National Science Foundation and the U.S. Agency for International Development.
- ⁱⁱⁱ The samples were designed using a common, multi-stage, stratified, area cluster approach. Random selection methods were used at each stage, with probability proportional to size where appropriate. Sampling frames were constructed in the first stages from the most up-to-date census figures or projections available, and thereafter from census maps, systematic walk patterns, and project-generated lists of household members. In each case the samples were sufficiently representative of national characteristics on key socio-economic indicators (gender, age, region, etc.) that statistical weighting of the data was not necessary. For the details of the sampling methods used in each case, see country survey reports available from IDASA, CDD or MSU.
- ^{iv} For a succinct current statement on the political implications of the neglected equity issue, see Karl, “Economic Inequality...,” 2000.
- ^v See J. Williamson, “Democracy and the Washington Consensus,” 1993.
- ^{vi} For recent empirical contributions to a vast literature on the exegesis of democracy see the following: Miller et.al. “Conceptions of Democracy...,” 1997; Simon, “Popular Conceptions...,” 1993; and Luckham, “Popular versus Liberal...,” 1998.
- ^{vii} Except where noted, all “average” figures are calculated as the raw mean of aggregate country distributions. This has the effect of weighting each country sample as if it were the same size. Mean scores are not corrected for the country’s population size.
- ^{viii} That is, excluding “don’t know”, “can’t explain”, and “never heard of the word ‘democracy’”, plus all refusals and missing responses.
- ^{ix} See Ake, *Democracy and Development*, 1996, p. 139.
- ^x The proportions in the “procedural” and “substantive” categories depend in part on how one classifies the response that defines democracy as “government by, for, or of the people”. If they voiced this interpretation, most respondents cast it as “government *by* the people”, which together with “government *of* the people”, is probably best interpreted in terms of political procedure. The figures reported here so classify it. But even if one excludes this response from analysis, or reclassifies it as “substantive”, a majority of respondents still opt for procedural interpretations (76 percent and 56 percent respectively).
- ^{xi} Namibians actually chose the “peace or unity” option less frequently (5 percent) than all respondents (6 percent).
- ^{xii} The question was not asked in Ghana.
- ^{xiii} At first we wondered whether respondents were led by the closed-ended list, being prompted to choose substantive attributes that they did not freely associate with democracy when asked in a completely undirected way. But factor analysis shows that political and economic responses cluster along separate dimensions and that people who emphasize democracy’s political procedures are not necessarily those who emphasize its economic substance.
- ^{xiv} For a recent exposition on “the primacy of the collective” see Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*, 1999, p.130.
- ^{xv} Whereas 22 percent of Ghanaians opt for “government by the people”, only 3 percent of Namibians do so.

^{xvi} *New Democracies Barometer IV* (1995), cited in Mishler and Rose, “Five Years After...,” 1998, p.13; and *Latinobarometro* (1995) cited in Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition...*, 1996, p.222.

^{xvii} See Bratton and Mattes, “Support for Democracy...,” 2001. The unstandardized average score for Ghana, Malawi, Namibia, Zimbabwe (1999) and South Africa (1997) is 65 percent.

^{xviii} Contingency coefficient = .142, sig = .000.

^{xix} In the north, where residents have seen control of the state pass from the central region to the southern region, people were twice as likely as Malawians countrywide to say that the form of government “makes no difference” (19 percent versus 11 percent).

^{xx} This approach heeds the advice of Rose et. al. to measure “real” rather than “ideal” conceptions of democracy. See *Democracy and Its Alternatives*, 1998, esp. Ch. 2.

^{xxi} Bivariate Pearson’s *r* correlation coefficient = .536, sig. = .000.

^{xxii} In Ghana and Zimbabwe, however, opposition to big man rule also surely reflects popular disaffection with sitting leaders who have overstayed their welcome.

^{xxiii} With data from *New Democracies Barometer IV* (1998), we estimate an average support-satisfaction gap for Eastern and Central Europe (6 countries) of about 5 percentage points. With data from the *Latinobarometro* 1995, we estimate an average gap for South America (4 countries) of about 13 percentage points. Depending on how it is measured, the average gap for sub-Saharan African countries in 1999-2000 is between 11 and 21 percentage points.

^{xxiv} See Vambe, “Popular Songs...,” 2000, p.80.

^{xxv} Whereas almost one-half (48 percent) of Ghanaians over 45 years of age were familiar with the ERP, only one-third (35 percent) aged 18 to 26 were similarly aware.

^{xxvi} In Nigeria, for example, education and awareness of SAP are closely related. Contingency coefficient = .505, sig. = .000.

^{xxvii} The actual name of the country’s economic program was inserted here.

^{xxviii} Because the data set is not complete for all market attitudes, Table 3 reports results for only four of the six countries surveyed on this and several other items. The sample is even more evenly divided if we use total distributions (*n* = 10,398), which over-weight the impact of the large Nigeria sub-sample (*n* = 3,603). By this measure, 50 percent support individual responsibility and 47 support government responsibility.

^{xxix} See Finifter and Mickiewicz, “Redefining the Political System...,” 1992.

^{xxx} When asked “who has responsibility for creating jobs?,” however, the results came out differently: 54 percent public sector, 6 percent private sector (individuals and businesses), and 28 percent joint public-private responsibility.

^{xxxi} Oil in Nigeria, cocoa in Ghana, diamonds in Namibia, and tobacco in Botswana, Malawi and Zimbabwe.

^{xxxii} See Bratton, “Political Participation...,” 1999, p. 559.

^{xxxiii} Centre for Democracy and Development, “Elite Attitudes...,” 2000.

^{xxxiv} The question was posed somewhat differently in the four countries where it was asked. In Ghana and Nigeria, we asked “how satisfied or unsatisfied are you with the (SAP)?”; in Malawi and Zimbabwe we asked “what effect do you think (SAP) has had on your life?”. For purposes of comparison, those who thought the SAP had made life

worse were assumed to be unsatisfied and those who thought it had made life better were assumed to be satisfied. Since either question was asked only to the minority who were aware of SAPs, the sample size was reduced to 3614 across four countries.

^{xxxv} Pearson's r correlation = .414, sig. = .000 for the four Southern African countries (.430, sig. = .000 for Ghana). The variables were only weakly related in Nigeria.

^{xxxvi} Percentages exclude "don't knows."

^{xxxvii} In Malawi and Zimbabwe, perceptions of the negative impact of SAPs on people's lives were almost perfectly associated with perceptions that only a few had benefitted (Pearson's r = .984, sig. = .000).

^{xxxviii} Pearson's r correlation = .006, sig. = .531. Calculations exclude "don't knows." All statistics quoted in this section of the paper are simple bivariate coefficients. Except in one instance (see note 53), regression analysis was not used since (a) causal direction was not known and (b) various aspects and of political and economic reform are examined (i.e. with a different dependent variable each time).

^{xxxix} Pearson's r correlation = .022, sig. = .182. Calculations exclude "don't knows."

^{xl} Pearson's r correlation = .322, sig. = .000. Calculations exclude "don't knows."

^{xli} 9 percent versus 20 percent.

^{xlii} We report results for Nigeria here because data on "what adjustment(is) supposed to do" was not available for all countries.

^{xliii} 79 percent versus 74 percent.

^{xliv} Caution is warranted with this finding since the sub-sample size on which it is based is rather small.

^{xlv} Contingency coefficient = .113, sig. = .000

^{xlvi} Contingency coefficient = .136, sig. = .000

^{xlvii} Contingency coefficients = .215 (for democracy) and = .355 (for economic reforms). Sigs. = .000

^{xlviii} Among Zambians, for example, educated persons are less likely to agree with the principle of the universal franchise. They are also less likely to vote. See Bratton, "Political Participation...", p. 564.

^{xlix} Pearson's r = .279 and .192 for Ghana and Nigeria respectively. Sigs. = .000

^l Contingency coefficient = .458, sig. = .000

^{li} Contingency coefficient = .406, sig. = .000

^{lii} Contingency coefficient = .349, sig. = .000.

^{liii} Contingency coefficient = .376, sig. = .000

^{liv} Contingency coefficients = .322 and .246 respectively, sigs. = .000

^{lv} All sigs. = .000

^{lvi} Though ordinary least squares regression explained little total variance, just 14 percent.

^{lvii} See Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market*, 1991.

^{lviii} For a definitive discussion of the political dynamics of partial economic reform see Hellman, “Winners Take All,” 1998. For Africa, see the chapter by Nicolas van de Walle in this volume and his book, *The Politics of Permanent Crisis*, 2001.

^{lix} The finding about democracy’s internal dynamics echoes at the micro-level what we demonstrated at the macro-level in Bratton and van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments*, 1997.